

Communication



EDN 513
Dr. Cathy Barlow
Fall 2003



Communication Channels

There are four channels of communication

- Verbal – face to face



- Written



- Body



- Machines/Electronic/Visual



- Verbal is that face to face dialogue that so many of use without thought
- Written is that communication that has been hand written--notes, papers, chalk board, in books, etc.
- Body is that communication that is conveyed subtly, intentionally, directionally by using any part of the body – hands, eyes, fingers, etc.
- Machines/Electronic/Visual communicating by way of pictures, videos, DVDs, etc.

Within each of the communication channels are multiple levels. There are four levels of verbal communication:

- Surface talk
- Reporting Facts
- Giving Opinions
- Sharing Feelings

Surface Talk is that communication that fills silence and requires little thought. Examples of surface talk are:

Chit Chat
Greetings
Comments on events
“How are you?”
Conversation with stranger

Surface talk has little or no value to the dialogue. It might be used for genuine concern or public relations.

A second level of verbal communication is the **Reporting of Facts**. We might report facts to be:

An attention “getter”
a listing of information
a display of figures, charts, and graphs
a scenario and/or story

These needs to be a tied to value to remember

You might want to use facts to get attention. This technique is used in advertising. For example – “90% of doctors say...”

We rarely use this in education. Many times we have soft or anecdotal data. Think back about the data you have been using the last few weeks on the web or from your text. Try to remember one data fact that one might use as an “attention getter.”

Another way to use the process of **Reporting Facts** is listing information. This technique can work either via power point or paper etc. The key is that the information is listed in small, chunked segments to allow for better retention. All of us have been in presentations that have had slides and slides of information and we were overwhelmed. We can present total information, but need to focus on smaller segments for retention and directed results. Review the Table 7.12 “Profile of an Equitable Classroom” (p. 171 of Using Data to Close the Achievement Gap). Review the lists of information within the table. If you did share all this information, what would you select to focus on for retention? (You do not need to do a written response)

Figures, charts, and graphs. Most of us are very visual in our attempt to “take in” information. Therefore, the visual representation of facts creates an immediate response. The narrative is now in “picture” format. A lot can be conveyed in a quick look – a hook, and then later

studied. Figure 2.12 (page 31 of the same textbook) sends a clear visual message: Rigorous curriculum improves scores for all subgroups.

Scenario/story. All of us like a story. We began learning with stories. Many of us like to have new information introduced by a story. For example: UNCW started as Wilmington College. That is a fact but it is more interesting to hear... When I attended Wilmington College, it was across from New Hanover H.S...

A third verbal communication level is **Giving Opinions**. When you are communicating to give an opinion, the verbal alerts are “lead ins” such as:

I think...

You should...

I heard...

We might...

Communicating an opinion should always carry such words. If we don't, opinion could be misinterpreted as fact.

The final level of verbal communication is **Sharing Feelings**. When you communicate to share feelings, the dialogue is influenced by the tone of your voice, the body language, the intimacy of the environment you select, and the volume of the voice. All of these variables determine the success or failure of communication intended to share feelings.

Let's consider some general guidelines for speaking clearly. If we are to communicate effectively to any individual, we might consider the following:

- Be specific, not vague
- Communicate observations, not assumptions
- Communicate about a behavior, not the person
- Communicate in terms of “more or less” not “either/or”
- Share ideas, do not give advice
- Communicate what was said, not why it was said
- Match nonverbal and verbal communication

As an administrator we should approach communication with a goal in mind. There are several aspects to communication I would like to discuss six of these with you.

- Purpose to be achieved by the message
- Person to whom message directed

- Sender of message
- Content of message
- Alternative channels for conveying message
- Need for feedback or response to the message

When we want to convey an important message we need to determine the goal of the message ahead of time. It really helps to orchestrate a major presentation or discussion with groups on individuals ahead of time. Please see the forms included that assist in an individual discussion with information for follow up that we will discuss later. One needs to clearly identify purpose of meeting or written memo (etc) prior to scheduling.

In addition, the person to whom the message is directed must be determined. If written, title, tone, style, length, (etc) must be identified to make sure message is appropriate for the recipient intended. If the recipient is not an educator, we need to exclude the educational jargon we all use. If we cannot exclude the educational lingo, then OVER explain the term and then have a non-educator read for understanding. The persons we most abuse with “educationalese” (or jargon) in communicating are the parents.

Another aspect is the sender of the message. We confuse people all the time by using “we” when we should use “I.” Many times we “couch” a message so much to avoid hurt feelings that we confuse the recipient as to the real source.

As one would expect, the content of the message is very important. I have found over the years the best way to convey content is to be short and simple. Some people call that the “KISS” (Keep It Simple S...) Method. There are several reasons to apply this method.

1. helps to crystallize our thoughts
2. helps the reader understand purpose
3. reduces time, paper or computer space for both
4. supports idea “less is best” in legal situations

Alternative channels to convey messages are many. The responsibility of a good leader is to find the most appropriate channel, not just the easiest. I will give you an example. In a previous position, I needed to present information to two bosses (President and Vice-President of a University). I prepared the material in two separate formats. For one, I prepared charts and graphs. For the other I prepared a narrative with key points. I would use the very difficult documents in the same meeting to present my information. The meetings usually were productive because each had the information in the way he best processed new information. It took more time in preparation but saved time overall due to little need for additional meetings and explanations.

And finally the concluding point in this section. The recipient needs to know if a response is required and in what format it is desired. This is achieved easier if in writing – see below.



Watson School of Education
Dean's Office

To:

From: Cathy Barlow

Date:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> For your information | <input type="checkbox"/> As requested |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Per our conversation | <input type="checkbox"/> As your authorization |

PLEASE:

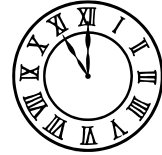
- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Call/See me | <input type="checkbox"/> Reply/Handle |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Note and Return | <input type="checkbox"/> Note and File |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Give me your advice/recommendation | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lend me your related correspondence | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Circulate to appropriate colleagues | |

REMARKS:

Now that we have talked about the channels of communication and aspects of communication for an administrator, it is important to review how to develop good lines of communication. Some simple suggestions are listed for you.



- Open door policy
- Arrive first, leave last
- Dialogue, dialogue, dialogue
- Grapevine
- Social events and TGIF's
- Visible presence
- Weekly (daily) bulletin



Many administrators use an open door policy. Some people are not comfortable with this style. It does, however, send a message that what faculty, staff, and parents need is important to you as a leader.

We also send a strong message by what we do. For example, we establish a strong work ethic by being the one who arrives first and leaves last. We communicate an entirely different message when we arrive late or leave early, or do both. I know you all have many examples of bosses reflective of start and leave times mentioned. Which one do you admire/respect?

As you remember in our Making Change game, the critical element was “talk to.” As one might guess, it is also essential to communicate. We must dialogue, dialogue, dialogue. The only way to convey your thoughts, goals, and directions is to communicate to your staff. In a movie titled *American President*, the president was being verbally attacked. He chose to be silent. However, he finally did respond because his silence caused an incorrect message to be sent. During a conversation with his staff, who were trying to convince him to speak out, they indicated his message wasn't getting out because the president's opponent was the only one doing the talking. It is essential that we as administrators not let our opponents to a project do the talking.

Another way of communicating is the grapevine. Most of the time this word has a negative connotation. Let's think of it in another way. You might want to send positive information through the grapevine. You might even start the information yourself. Tell one person... If there is negative information in the grapevine, you need to determine how to control or change that information. Let me give you an example.

When I was an assistant principal, I had a counselor who would try to foil everything I would try to do. She would even start numerous rumors that were not true, but she would tell me what a great job I was doing and send me congratulatory notes. One morning she popped into my office and left a positive note. I decided I needed to gain control of the situation. I followed her to the teachers' lounge. I told the group what a terrific morning it was because I had received a “warm, fuzzy” from a colleague. I read the note aloud and thanked my colleague publicly for being so thoughtful. She turned white! By this method, I defused her “grapevine” tactics via a nice route. Her creditability in that area was gone. I am sure you all have similar stories.

We do need to socialize with the faculty and staff. They need to see you in other venues. It also gives you the opportunity to do the same. Orchestrate some social events and TGIF's.

One of the negative results of meetings and paperwork that are so much a part of the principal's life is that one becomes "stuck" in the office. Try to schedule times that you walk the building, drop in on classes and in offices. The visible presence can do a lot to assist with morale, control, and attitude. Be sure to take a notepad with you or your handheld because people will invariably mention items to you that need to be done, and it will be forgotten if not noted. Remember the janitor in our video clip.

Another excellent way to communicate and keep projects and ideas to the forefront is a weekly bulletin. This can be achieved on paper, electronic, or by TV for those that produce their own programs. Other ways to develop good lines of communication are:



- Lunches with teachers
- Building leadership teams
- Staff meetings
- Team, dept. or grade level meetings
- Surveys/force field analyses "dipsticking"

Most of the ways listed above you have an understanding of how to do. The last suggestion involves data and we know data is important. The term "dipsticking" you might not know.

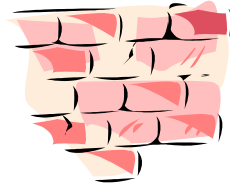
Dipsticking is a way to do a check. Think of the dipstick in your car that you use to check the oil. When one teaches, it is imperative to check for understanding. As teachers, we do that by questioning, signaling, testing, etc. As principals, we need to do the same thing. We need to dipstick or check for progress of a plan, check to make faculty and staff understand, and many other examples. We can do this by watching, by asking, by being visible, etc.

As we try to understand and use communication strategies appropriately, we also know that our goal of communication can best be achieved in a secure climate. Some ways to do that are:

- Be honest by making open statements about your feelings, attitudes, and reactions to situations
- Be tactful and sensitive to staff needs, feelings, problems, and treat people in a non-threatening manner
- Accept people as they are by respecting individual staff differences, opinions, perceptions, and approaches
- Have a positive approach when you greet people, smile at them, and inquire about their health, problems, and joys
- Be dependable so that you are trusted by the staff

Sometimes we can impede communication because we are putting up barriers in receiving information. Some barriers we must use to keep people from wanting to communicate to us are:

- Lack of interest
- Lack of knowledge
- Bias
- Social barriers
- Situation



We might show a lack of interest when someone is speaking to us. This sends a real message. We all know about that. We have had that happen to us. We can also send up a barrier if we don't know and pretend to know. Another example is if we are supposed to know the answer and don't. It might indicate lack of interest caused by our lack of knowledge.

Most of us have a bias or two 😊. We need to practice neutrality to overcome that bias. We need to constantly try to remove our personal biases in any communication and/or decision making.

There are social barriers that we might send out. For example, when I was in a city that housed corporate headquarters of the Phillips 66 Oil Company, teachers and students interacted according to the spouse rank(s) at the company. This was an ongoing barrier to communication throughout the school system.

Sometimes the situation itself is a barrier. You might be too involved, too upset to respond or communicate. In those examples time is the friend to the barrier. Give “chill or cool down” time and some space prior to attempting to communicate or problem solve.

We have talked about barriers to communicate. Now we need to zero in on the act of listening.



Four Ways Not to Listen

- Nonlistening
- Listening to ignore
- Listening selectively
- Listening for the Ego



As you know, many of us are excellent at “tuning people out” or nonlistening. We may be looking at them but not actually listening. Every employee, parent, and student need to feel they have your undivided attention. A nonlistening behavior can hamper communication for any organization. News travels fast. People make a long-term judgment regarding an individual (in this case – principal) using one interaction.

Sometimes we listen to ignore. We listen intently but do not concentrate or plan to retain the information. We have done the socially correct thing. We have appeased to listener. Many of us accuse our friends and significant others of this practice. It's the basis for any good argument.

Many times we tend to listen selectively. We listen to parts of a communication to gather pieces for our next response or only those parts that might be beneficial to us. The only time this

technique is positive is in dialogue filled with emotion. If we listen for the major points and not anger, etc, it is productive.

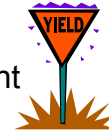
The final point in discussing the four ways to listen is “listening for Ego.” We listen for those parts that will support our stance or boost our purpose. This is not effective communication.

One of the best techniques to have productive dialogue is something I call “involved listening.” Another good name might be productive listening.

Involved Listening



- Step 1: Speaker makes a statement
- Step 2: Listening paraphrases speaker’s statement
- Step 3: Speaker accepts paraphrase or clarifies
- Step 4: If rejected, speaker repeats Step 1. If accepted, listener is free to express thought or feeling



Using these steps requires intense, supportive listening. I used to apply this technique in my own family. They caught on when I first used it and would say, “There she goes again.” Soon they got used to it and it usually worked.

Here are some involved listening techniques:

- AVOID the accusing **YOU**
- Question for understanding
- Restate for understanding and clarification

It is so important to avoid using “YOU.” For example, “YOU said....” When any of us hear “YOU,” we immediately start thinking of a defense. Think about disagreements and discussions you have had recently. I am sure the accusing YOU was in the discussion and probably caused the discussion to escalate.

To help clarity and be involved in the discussion, understanding is imperative. It is important to question, question, question. However, we need to do this in the appropriate manner. Use the technique we all use with young children to avoid hurt feelings. When shown a picture that we don’t know what it is, we say “tell me about that” or “explain this part to me.” We need to say, “Explain a little more about....”

I am sure you get the idea. The last technique is the amount of restating for understanding and clarification. What we need to say is “please listen to my statement and see if I understand what you are saying.” You will have your own words but that is the idea.

I ask that you try this during the week at least one time. Email your success or failure by Nov. 5, 2003

There are some listening habits and recommended behaviors that need to be avoided.

- Faking attention
- Listening for facts, not considering broader picture
- Concentrating on physical appearance and delivery, not content
- Yielding to distractions
- Dismissing content as uninteresting
- Ceasing to listen due to difficulty of content

We also want to make sure we continue to develop excellent behavior.

- Screening out extraneous distractions
- Concentrating mentally and physically
- Listening with a *third* ear
- Question to draw out
- Responding nonjudgementally
- Summarize periodically

We have talked a lot about the verbal communication channels. Mainly because this is the preferred and most used channel for most of us. Now we will discuss the written communication channel.

Most of us recognize the types of written communication that follows:



Note

- Memorandum
- Community Newspaper
- School Bulletin
- Internet
- Electronic Chalkboard
- Palm top Computer



Please know in any communication written or verbal there are several points to remember. We need to:

- Know the audience
- Avoid jargon
- Clear and concise (quick and dirty)
- Establish a reason to read
- Develop a hook
- Always proof, proof, proof

A wise person once told me to always make sure a document for public review was proofed by two different persons before it left the office.

The third channel of communication is body language. We send messages by our non-verbal actions. Sometimes we send mixed or opposing messages. We may say one thing but our body language says another. We do it all the time. We say “yes” to someone (usually a spouse, friend, etc) indicating he/she can go, but we really don’t want them to do so. Our body language is usually saying “no.”

Some points to note:



- You always send a message
- Your eyes talk
- Your hands talk
- Your body positions talk
- Your mouth talks even when lips are not moving



One thing we cannot do as administrators is send conflicting messages.

Our fourth channel of communication is that of machines/electronic. These are a few:



- Telephone
- PA system
- Overhead/Slide Projector/Document Camera
- Radio/Television
- Video Tapes
- Electronic Mail
- Internet
- Laser Disk
- CD-Rom
- DVD
- etc



We now beam responses. We use email more than talk face to face in society. In this fast paced society, how do we make sure our thoughts are conveyed appropriately? Quick email responses are often misunderstood. We are not there in person to explain. What are the solutions?

We have to take the knowledge we have, blend it with our style, and plan our responses to communicate in the best manner.

As stated before we need to act, not react.